United Nations A/C.1/52/PV.2

General Assembly

Official Records

First Committee

2nd Meeting
Thursday, 9 October 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Nkgowe ..... (Botswana)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Statement by the Chairman

The Chairman: At the outset, I should like to extend a warm and sincere welcome to all delegations participating in the deliberations of the First Committee at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. I take advantage of this opportunity to express my profound appreciation to all Member States for the privilege and honour they have bestowed upon me and my country by electing me Chairman of this important body of the General Assembly. I am honoured and deeply indebted to all members for the trust and confidence they have placed in me.

Permit me to say how much I appreciate the generous remarks made by the representative of Belarus, Ambassador Sychou, when he presented my nomination to the Assembly for the post of Chairman of the First Committee. I wish to express on behalf of the entire membership of the Committee, as well as on my own behalf, our congratulations to Ambassador Sychou on the skilful and effective manner in which he conducted the proceedings of the First Committee at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.

As I assume my responsibility as Chairman of this body, it is gratifying for me to know that I can count on the cooperation of all members of the Committee, as well as on the valuable experience and profound knowledge of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, Mr. Jin Yongjian, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Prendergast, the Director of the Centre for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Davinic, and the Secretary of the First Committee, Mr. Lin Kuo-Chung, and his colleagues in the Secretariat, who will greatly contribute to the successful completion of our work.

Election of the Vice-Chairman and the Rapporteur

The Chairman: With regard to the election of the members of the Bureau, I wish to inform the Committee that consultations between concerned regional groups are still ongoing. I suggest that the Committee take up the issue at a later date.

It was so decided.

Organization of work

The Chairman: May I draw attention to document A/C.1/52/1, containing a letter dated 19 September 1997 addressed to me by the President of the General Assembly, informing me that the General Assembly had decided to allocate 22 items to the First Committee for its consideration.

In accordance with established practice, the First Committee begins its substantive work only after the conclusion of the general debate in the plenary meetings of the General Assembly. Furthermore, in order to ensure effective deliberations, and as a cost-saving measure, the President of the General Assembly requests all main Committees to conclude their work no later than 28 November 1997.

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This record contains the original texts of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

As a result of a series of extensive informal consultations with a number of individual delegations and representatives of the regional groups, and taking into account the time
limitation, I would like to propose a programme of work and timetable as contained in document A/C.1/52/CRP.1. This programme of work and timetable, as members are aware, was considered and accepted *ad referendum* at the informal meeting of the Committee held on Tuesday, 7 October. I hope the Committee will be in a position to approve it today. In arriving at this proposal I have been guided by past practice and precedents that have evolved during recent years, which I believe have enabled the First Committee to conduct its work in the most efficient and cost-saving manner possible. Accordingly, delegations will observe that the consideration of agenda items is divided into two phases: namely, first, those items dealing with disarmament and international security issues, that is, agenda items 62 to 82; and, secondly, agenda item 83, "Rationalization of the work and reform of the agenda of the First Committee".

Moreover, I should like to draw attention to the fact that, owing to the large number of items and the complexity of the issues before the Committee, there is a further demarcation into specific stages separating the general debate from structured informal discussion of specific subjects on the adopted thematic approach on those items and from the consideration of and action on draft resolutions and decisions under those items. In addition, as in the past, precise deadlines have been introduced with respect to the submission of draft resolutions and draft decisions under the two groupings.

As indicated in the programme of work and timetable, the First Committee will begin its substantive session on Monday, 13 October, for the general debate on all disarmament and related international security agenda items, namely, agenda items 62 to 82. A total of 10 meetings from Monday, 13 October, to Friday, 24 October, will be devoted to this stage of the work of the Committee.

In this regard, I appeal to delegations to kindly limit the time for the delivery of their statements, if at all possible, to 15 minutes, in order to enable all those delegations wishing to participate in the general debate to do so within the short time allocated for that purpose. I would also like to invite those delegations wishing to participate in the general debate to kindly inscribe their names on the list of speakers as soon as possible in order to enable the Committee to fully and constructively utilize the time and conference resources available to it. Moreover, it should be noted that the deadline for the closure of the list of speakers for the general debate on all disarmament and international security agenda items will be Monday, 13 October, at 6 p.m.

From Monday, 27 October, to Friday, 31 October, the First Committee will hold informal structured discussions on specific subjects on the adopted thematic approach on disarmament and international security agenda items. Based on past experience, a total of six meetings will be set aside for this phase of the Committee's work. In this regard, I would like to inform the Committee that I and the officers of the Committee, with the assistance and cooperation of the Secretariat, will provide the necessary information to members of the Committee well in advance concerning each subject and the time allocated for an exchange of views on it. If we conclude this phase of our work earlier than scheduled, those meetings saved could be shifted to other stages of the Committee's work — for example, informal consultations.

The next stage of our work will be the consideration of and action on the draft resolutions. The deadline for the submission of draft resolutions on all disarmament and international security agenda items will be Wednesday, 29 October, at 6 p.m. I wish to request representatives' cooperation in adhering strictly to that deadline. Delegations are strongly encouraged to introduce their draft resolutions as early as possible. Furthermore, it is imperative that delegations submit those draft resolutions that could entail programme budget implications as early as possible in order to enable the Secretariat to prepare the necessary programme budget implications on time, and also to enable the Committee to take action upon them with a view to meeting the mandatory deadline required for their submission to the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly. In this connection, I should like to inform delegations that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee need adequate time to review the programme budget implications of draft resolutions before the latter can be acted upon by the Assembly.

According to the programme of work and time-table, from Monday, 3 November, to Tuesday, 4 November, the First Committee will hold an exchange of views on agenda item 83, entitled "Rationalization of the work and reform of the agenda of the First Committee". A total of two meetings will be devoted to that purpose. The deadline for the submission of draft resolutions on agenda item 83 will be Friday, 31 October, at 6 p.m.

With regard to the next phase of the work of the Committee, the period from Wednesday, 5 November, to Friday, 7 November, will be devoted to the consideration of draft resolutions submitted under all agenda items. A total of three meetings will be set aside for this phase of the work of the Committee.

Last but not least, during the period from Monday, 10 November, to Tuesday, 18 November, the First Committee will proceed to take action on all draft resolutions submitted under the agenda items of the Committee. A total of nine meetings, which I believe should be sufficient for that purpose, will be allocated for that phase of work.

Based on the proposed programme of work and time-table that I have just briefly outlined, the First Committee should be able to complete consideration of all the agenda items allocated to it by the General Assembly within the time-frame to which I have referred. It is my sincere hope that this programme of work and time-table, which was formulated after due consultations and following past precedents, meets with members' approval.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the First Committee adopts the programme of work and time-table contained in document A/C.1/52/CRP.1.

Mr. Parnohadiningrat (Indonesia): First of all, my delegation would like to express its satisfaction at seeing you, Sir, chair this very important Committee. You can always rest assured of the cooperation of my delegation.

Concerning the proposed programme of work and time-table, if I understand correctly, Sir, you are suggesting that the time we save on one or two items in this draft proposed programme of work could be allocated to other activities. In the view of my delegation, we would rather see the time saved allocated to informal consultations within each political or regional grouping or among political or regional groupings. There are many issues that those groups can discuss or negotiate — among other things, draft resolutions that may be submitted by groups or individual countries. So the time saved should be allocated to informal consultations among or within the groups that wish to hold such consultations.

Secondly, as concerns the time to be allocated to the consideration of and action on all draft resolutions submitted under all agenda items, we note that it is proposed that from Wednesday, 5 November, until Friday, 7 November, this Committee will be given a chance to consider all draft resolutions. In the view of my delegation, it should be considered that perhaps we might need to extend the consideration of all the draft resolutions submitted. I should therefore like to suggest that consideration of all draft resolutions begin on Wednesday, 5 November, and end on Tuesday, 18 November, and that action on all draft resolutions submitted under all agenda items take place from Wednesday, 19 November, to Friday, 21 November. Thus the Committee would work, if necessary, until 21 November.

One of the reasons for this proposal by my delegation is that at this time, the General Assembly has a very important issue to address: the issue of reform. Of course, it is not the intention of my delegation to suggest that the question of reform be taken up by the First Committee, but the time saved could perhaps be useful for small delegations to attend the meetings that will be convened by the President of the General Assembly to address the questions of reform proposed by the Secretary-General. Indeed, besides the need for all groups to consult with one another or within the groups themselves, there is also a need for us to provide ample time for small delegations also to participate in the General Assembly's discharging of its task of addressing the question of reform. In brief, I should like to draw representatives' attention to the need to give the First Committee ample time to work during this fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

Mrs. Arce de Jeannet (Mexico) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Since this is the first time that my delegation is taking the floor, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to chair the work of our Committee and reaffirm my delegation's readiness to make a constructive contribution to the work of this Committee and to the success of our session.

My delegation would like through you, Sir, to seek clarification on what was said about some of the phases of our Committee's work. Assuming we end our discussions on one particular area early, could we use that time to make progress in other pending areas? That is, if the meetings of our Committee end before 18 November. That is one point on which my delegation seeks clarification.

If that is the understanding, my delegation would join the delegation of Indonesia in suggesting that we should allow some flexibility to give all delegations sufficient time for consultations on the draft resolutions before the Committee. Moreover, we should not be limited to a rigid time-frame, which could put pressure on us as we consider specific items. Most of us here know that consultations are underway on one of the major issues of this session; some

delegations have said that while those consultations continue outside the First Committee, we should avoid overlapping work in other bodies.

We realize that there may be some difficulty in accommodating these requests, but my delegation feels that the work of the First Committee should be granted a margin of flexibility so that we can give detailed consideration to all the items on our agenda.

Mr. Manickam (India): I congratulate you on your election, Mr. Chairman; you may rest assured that my delegation will cooperate with you and support you in your efforts to ensure that the Committee's work at this session takes place smoothly and with success.

On the programme of work, I subscribe to most of the points made by the last two speakers. Shifting any meeting-time saved owing to lack of speakers would create many complications. Last year's experience shows that there needs to be some flexibility as regards the deadlines for the submission of draft resolutions and for discussion and action on draft resolutions. We request that there be no change in the deadline as it stands and that it not be moved forward.

Secondly, if there should be any savings in meetings, these should be made available for informal consultations.

Finally, even though we are trying tentatively to end our work on 18 November, the three remaining days of that week might be required. We need to take that fact into account given the large number of draft resolutions we are likely to be considering.

The Chairman: I have taken due note of the comments made thus far. Let me observe that part of the reason for using saved meetings for informal consultations relates precisely to the issue raised by the representative of Indonesia: United Nations reform. The President of the General Assembly has decided that, when the Assembly is discussing issues of reform in plenary meeting, the First, Second and Third Committees might have to forgo their meetings in order to participate in plenary meetings. If that is not workable, we could split the time: the Committee might meet from 10 to 11 a.m., and members would then go to the plenary meeting. That is why we might need the time we have saved for informal consultations: precisely because we might have that disruption in our work.

But I agree with the representative of Mexico that we should show as much flexibility as possible. Our intention is indeed to finish our work on 18 November but, if that fails, the timetable will be extended through 21 November. That has already been taken into consideration.

I call on the Secretary of the Committee.

Mr. Lin Kuo-Chung (Secretary of the First Committee): Having heard the comments made by representatives, I would like to make the following points. As members are aware, the General Assembly has adopted certain understandings — even rules; these will come into effect next year. But the First Committee and the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) are going to implement one of these this year: the First Committee and the Fourth Committee will not meet simultaneously, in order to enable small delegations to attend meetings of both Committees.

Secondly, as members are aware, there are only five large conference rooms but six Main Committees; there must therefore be an arrangement among the Committees as regards their meetings. It is therefore the general rule that in a given week no Main Committee will have more than seven meetings, and, through arrangements with Meetings Servicing, all the dates and numbers of meetings are fixed. Any change would disrupt all the arrangements for other Committees.

Finally, relating to the final week, when the Committee will take action on draft resolutions, members know that there are only three conference rooms with voting machines. There must therefore be an arrangement by which Committees taking action on draft resolutions are assigned specific rooms. It is very difficult to change the timetable for the final week, as we are scheduled to take action on draft resolutions using the voting machine.

I hope delegations will take those factors into account.

Mr. King (United States of America): The United States, Sir, is pleased to see you in the Chair; of course, you can expect the full cooperation of my delegation during this session.

I would like to make a couple of comments, first on comments that have been made, then on Mr. Lin's remarks. First, the United States would like to support fully the schedule of meetings and programme of work which the Secretariat has proposed to the First Committee. We feel that the timing set out there is about right in terms of all the conflicting pressures upon us in terms of other meetings, the size of delegations, and cost restraints. We

hope it might be possible somehow to manage to stay within the schedule of meetings.

I realize that there is a need for flexibility, and that we may actually have to use flexibility. But flexibility can work both ways. It has been noted that we might need some extra days to accomplish our work. I would like to make a few observations about that. First of all, I think that those extra days would be costly in terms of the finances required to continue the operations of the First Committee beyond the already generally-agreed termination date. This could also mean that there might have to be simultaneous meetings with other Committees previously scheduled to meet in those last three days of the week of 17 November, adding to the strain on Secretariat resources.

A third point: the First Committee session is already longer than the norm, which in the past few years has been five weeks. The extra two days allocated this year are, I think, exceeding the norm that has been established.

We have already shown that we can accomplish our work within a five-week period, so I would hope that the extra two days would be more than sufficient to accommodate any extra needs we might have for further negotiations.

As far as the saved meetings that we might achieve in the earlier part of the session are concerned, perhaps these might be used actually to shorten the First Committee session, and even possibly to end it on Friday, 14 November, if we can move our work up. This will, of course, have important savings in terms of time, resources and pressures on the rest of us, so that other meetings might be scheduled to take the place of the two meetings that we would then be able to forgo on 17 and 18 November. These are my comments on the organization of work.

On a related subject, may I ask you, Sir: will the records of the First Committee this year be verbatim records or will they be summary records?

The Chairman: The records will be verbatim records.

Mr. Parnohadiningrat (Indonesia): Am I correct in my understanding that we can use the time saved for group consultations? I listened carefully to one delegation which suggested using any savings to shorten our First Committee session. I still believe that we perhaps need more time to conduct consultations, so time-saving should not be used to shorten the session.

The Chairman: I understand the concern that has been expressed, but I believe that the meetings as scheduled now should be sufficient for our work. As I said earlier, we will exercise as much flexibility as possible. But if we can finish ahead of time, that will be fine; there should be no problem with that. We will try to accommodate delegations as much as we can.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): First of all, Sir, I would like to congratulate you on your election as Chairman of the First Committee. I assure you of the support and cooperation of our delegation.

I have a question for the Secretariat for clarification. I would like to know how many meetings the First Committee had last year for the general debate.

The Chairman: I invite the Secretary of the Committee to reply.

Mr. Lin Kuo-Chung (Secretary of the Committee): The allocation of the meetings is always the same as last year. Even the total number of meetings is exactly the same as last year. Therefore, delegations should note that if we cancel any meetings this year, then, through the statistics, next year the meetings schedule will give the exact number which we utilized this year. That means we will be short of a number of meetings next year. So I would suggest that delegations not suggest cancelling a meeting, but, rather, utilize it in full in some way. Perhaps we will have a one-hour meeting that later on will be used for the regional group or for consultations regarding a draft resolution, or whatever.

Mr. Abdel Aziz (Egypt): I would like to join in expressing our happiness at seeing you in the Chair, Sir, as a representative of Africa, and we wish you every success in this session.

I wanted to touch again on the question of flexibility, because Mr. Lin said it was agreed that the First and the Fourth Committees would not have more than seven meetings a week, but looking at the schedule I noticed that only during one week do we have seven meetings: the week of 10-14 November. For the purpose of flexibility, if the work of the Committee at a certain period requires it, I think the Secretariat should do preparatory work to increase the number of meetings from five to seven. In certain weeks we have only four meetings; in other weeks we have five meetings; and in other weeks we have seven meetings. We should also be prepared to extend our work to 21 November, if need be. I fully support your approach to

flexibility, Sir, but I hope the flexible approach will be interpreted both ways. One way is by adding more meetings, if that is required at any stage, to the weeks within the schedule we have. The other is that if we run short of time on 18 November we could extend to 21 November, have some extra night sessions, or do whatever else would be necessary to finish the work of the First Committee within the budget and within the framework which Mr. Lin outlined.

With this in mind, Sir, we can agree with your proposal for a plan of work for the First Committee. Again, I wish you the best of luck.

The Chairman: I must comment on the subject of flexibility. I would like to avoid having night meetings. Therefore, I said that we shall try to finish our work by 18 November. That date must be our target. If we go to 21 November, it should really be because we could not agree on everything. But we should endeavour to finish on 18 November.

At this stage, I believe the programme of work and timetable are acceptable to the Committee. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the First Committee adopts the programme of work and timetable contained in document A/C.1/52/CRP.1.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I would now like to draw the attention of the Committee to the relevant rules and recommendations of the General Assembly affecting the work of the Main Committees, including those contained in General Assembly decision 34/401.

In order to fully use the time and conference services made available to the Committee, I would like, with your cooperation and support, to begin the meetings of the Committee at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. sharp and to adjourn the meetings at 1 p.m. and 6 p.m., respectively. Permit me to strongly emphasize the utmost importance of punctuality in the interest of ensuring an effective and orderly organization of our work and achieving economy for our Organization.

I now give the floor to the Secretary of the Committee to make a statement.

Mr. Lin Kuo-Chung (Secretary of the Committee): I would like to draw the attention of the Committee to the following points regarding the organization of work.

First, the General Assembly has decided once again to depart during this session from the rule that one quarter of the Members must be present before a meeting of a Main Committee may be declared open and debate permitted to proceed. The General Assembly made this recommendation on the understanding that such a departure from the rules did not involve any permanent change in the relevant provisions of rules 67 and 108 of the rules of procedure, pertaining to the opening of meetings, whereby a majority of Members must be present for any decision to be taken.

Secondly, as indicated in the programme of work and the timetable, the list of speakers for the general debate on all disarmament and international security agenda items will be closed on Monday, 13 October, at 6 p.m. Quite a number of delegations have already indicated their intention to participate in the general debate, and the Secretariat has taken note of those requests. I urge those delegations wishing to participate in the general debate to kindly inscribe their names on the list of speakers as soon as possible so that the Committee can fully utilize the time and conference facilities available to it. In this connection, delegations are requested to provide at least 30 copies of all prepared statements to the conference officer for conference servicing purposes.

Thirdly, in connection with the submission of draft resolutions, I ask delegations to note that draft resolutions, amendments and the names of sponsors thereof, should be submitted to the Secretariat in writing to ensure their accuracy and to avoid any possible misunderstanding. Requests for use of conference rooms for group meetings should also be submitted in writing as early as possible so that the necessary arrangements may be made in time.

Fourthly, I should like to draw the attention of members to General Assembly decision 34/401, and particularly to its provisions dealing with explanation of vote and right of reply, namely, paragraphs 6, 7 and 8 of that decision, which pertain to those particular issues.

Fifthly, I should also like to draw the Committee's attention to document A/C.1/52/INF.1, which will be issued on Monday 13 October. This document will list, for the purposes of information and ready reference, all documents before the First Committee issued as of 3 October 1997. That list will be updated as appropriate during this session.

Sixthly, delegations are requested to kindly submit the list of members of their delegations to the First Committee to the Secretariat as soon as possible, in order to enable the

Secretariat to circulate the Committee's membership list as early as possible.

Seventhly, I would like to draw members' attention to the fact that the Committee on Conferences at its substantive session in 1996 considered an item on unedited verbatim transcripts, which were used for the first time by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space at its thirty-ninth session in June 1996. During the discussion on the matter, the view was expressed that, while such transcripts were not an ideal solution, they could be issued and corrected more speedily than verbatim and summary records and appeared to be a satisfactory, cost-efficient measure. It was felt that it would be useful to have a thorough cost analysis of written meeting records and of unedited transcripts. The view was also expressed that unedited transcripts, which were still being used on an experimental basis in Vienna, were of doubtful benefit. Delegations there had yet to make recommendations about the change in records. However, it was felt that it would be useful to inform bodies entitled to written meeting records about the cost benefits that might derive from using unedited transcripts, and encourage them to request such transcripts at one meeting on an experimental basis to supplement their usual records. The Secretariat assured the Committee on Conferences that such an experiment could be absorbed within existing resources. At this juncture, the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences has been informed by the Secretariat that the notional cost of a verbatim record is $14,900; that of a summary record is $6,976; and that of an unedited transcript is $2,600. Unedited transcripts would thus appear to be the most cost-effective of the three records.

The Committee on Conferences consequently requested its Chairman to invite intergovernmental bodies concerned to consider the possibility of requesting the Secretariat to issue unedited transcripts of one meeting for comparison purposes with a view to the possible substitution of such transcripts for their usual records in the future. Accordingly, the First Committee, at its organizational session on 9 October 1996, on the proposal of its Chairman at the fifty-first session, decided to select its eighth meeting, which was held on Friday 18 October at 3 p.m., for the suggested experimental purpose in order to allow the Secretariat to issue the unedited transcript of that meeting for comparison.

In this connection, I would like to inform members that the unedited transcript of the aforementioned meeting of the First Committee was transmitted to the secretariat of the Committee after the First Committee had concluded its work at that session. Therefore, no action was taken by the Committee.

The unedited transcript of the eighth meeting of the First Committee, which was held on 18 October 1996, has already been distributed to the members of the Committee. I urge members of the Committee to kindly consider the unedited text and transmit their comments to me as soon as possible, but not later than 31 October 1997, as to whether the Committee should continue its past practice by having the usual verbatim records or whether it should substitute it with unedited transcripts of its proceedings in the future. The Committee's view will be transmitted to the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences accordingly.

The Chairman: The Committee will begin its substantive work as scheduled on Monday 13 October at 10 a.m. sharp.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.